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WOMEN IN EARLY INDIAN

BUDDHISM

*Comparative Textual Studies*

Edited by Alice Collett

# Women in Early Indian Buddhism

*Comparative Textual Studies*

*Edited by*

ALICE COLLETT

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## Contents

### Contributors

vii

### A Note on Non-English Words

x

### Abbreviations

xi

### Introduction—ALICE COLLETT

I

1. The Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭī Manuscripts: Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and the Order of Nuns in a Gandhāran Version of the *Dakṣināvibhaṅgasūtra*—INGO STRAUCH 17

2. The British Library Kharoṣṭī Fragments: Behind the Birch Bark Curtain—TIMOTHY LENZ 46

3. Pali Vinaya: Reconceptualizing Female Sexuality in Early Buddhism—ALICE COLLETT 62

4. Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravāda *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya*: The Intersection of Womanly Virtue and Buddhist Asceticism—AMY PARIS LANGENBERG 80

5. Aṅguttara-nikāya/Ekottarika-āgama: Outstanding Bhikkhunīs in the *Ekottarika-āgama*—BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO 97

6. Saṃyutta-nikāya/Saṃyukta-āgama: Defying Māra—Bhikkhunīs in the *Saṃyukta-āgama*—BHIKKHU ANĀLAYO 116

7. Therīgāthā: Nandā, Female Sibling of Gotama Buddha—ALICE COLLETT 140

8. Apadāna: Therī-apadāna: Wives of the Saints: Marriage and Kamma in the Path to Arahanthood—JONATHAN S. WALTERS 160

9. <i>Avadānaśataka</i> : The Role of Brahmanical Marriage in a Buddhist Text—KAREN MULDOON-HULES	192
10. <i>Dhammapada-attakathā/Saddharmaratnāvaliya</i> : Women in Medieval South Asian Buddhist Societies—RANJINI OBEYESEKERE	221
<i>Bibliography</i>	247
<i>Index</i>	267

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## Apadāna: Therī-apadāna

WIVES OF THE SAINTS: MARRIAGE AND KAMMA  
IN THE PATH TO ARAHANTSHIP

*Jonathan S. Walters*

### Introduction

THE APADĀNA is an early post-Asokan (ca. 2nd–1st century BCE) collection of hagiographical texts in Pāli verse, which is included in the *Khuddakanikāya* of the Pāli *Tripitaka* as perhaps the latest and final addition to that canon.<sup>1</sup> It opens with brief, putative autobiographies of the Buddha (*Buddhāpadāna*) and of the Paccekabuddhas, unnamed men who in the past achieved Buddhahood without teaching and establishing a religious community (*Paccekabuddhāpadāna*). But the bulk of the collection narrates the lives of monks (*Therāpadāna*) and nuns (*Therī-apadāna*) who became saints (*arahants*) in the dispensation (*sāsana*) of the historical Buddha. These too are presented as autobiographical (or more precisely, “autohagiographical”)

<sup>1</sup>. This chapter has been composed as part of a larger project to translate the entire *Apadāna* into English, which at this writing (2012) I am pursuing with the generous support of sabbatical leave from Whitman College, and for which I express my gratitude. The *Apadāna* is the only text of the vast Pāli *Tripitaka* that remains untranslated into a Western language, though portions of it have appeared in various publications, including my own (Walters 1995). It figures centrally in Walters (1990); Walters (1994); Walters (1997); Walters (2003). For fuller studies of the entire text than I am able to provide or engage here, see also Bechert (1958); Cutler (1994). All translations of the *Apadāna* in this chapter are my own, and I provide them in English verse approximating the meter of the original Pāli due to my conviction that these texts were meant for rhythmic performance. Filler words, odd alternate forms, repetitious phrases, fudged grammar, and so forth in the text betray the centrality of metrical composition to the original authors and editors, and so I have followed suit. While my translations aim to be literal ones, in small ways I have taken poetic license in order to meet the daunting challenge of making the Pāli meter work in modern English. In this chapter I have not reproduced the critical apparatus that indicates those junctures, but the interested reader can find it in the scholarly version of the full translation, which will be available for free at [www.whitman.edu/Penrose](http://www.whitman.edu/Penrose) once it is completed. Cf. also notes 3, 5, and 7, below.

narratives, in which each monk or nun explains, in the first person, the process that led to his or her achievement of arahantship.

Some of these men and women are well known from other (often earlier) sources, but the majority of them are known only to *Apadāna*. This majority is listed therein as personifications of meritorious deeds (with names like “Lamp-Giver” or “Foot-Worshiper”) rather than being assigned names of historical individuals believed to have played important roles in the early Buddhist community.<sup>2</sup> In their *apadānas* particularly, but even in those of the otherwise famous monks and nuns, *Apadāna* often merely alludes to, or even fails altogether to mention, certain details. The sorts of details of the present/final life that might be expected of a biographical or hagiographical narrative and that, in the case of the famous monks and nuns, are known from other sources are often absent. Instead, in all cases, *apadānas* narrate the process leading to arahantship (or in the case of the Buddha, Buddhahood) as the result primarily of meritorious deeds performed in *previous* lives, during the times of previous Buddhas and Paccekabuddhas. Thus in a typical *apadāna* a monk or nun begins by describing the meritorious deed he or she performed during the time of a previous Buddha, details the subsequent happy rebirths (both human and divine) experienced as results of that deed, and concludes by portraying his or her present-life arahantship as the culmination of that same kammic trajectory.

In other work (Walters 1997) I have interpreted this focus on pieties performed during previous lives in light of the expansion of the Buddhist community after the 3rd century BCE. The earlier texts in the Pāli canon had certainly established by then the expectation that good deeds performed by laypeople and less advanced monks and nuns would result in good rebirths among people and in various heavens. However, the achievement of arahantship—which entails the end of all rebirth, *nibbāna*—was narrated as the exclusive domain of advanced monks and nuns, whose intellectual penetration and meditative effort produced that religious goal. Ordinary people could look forward to future lives as advanced monks and nuns, during which they too could pursue arahantship. But the sorts of religious activities that they typically performed in the present life (and which most Theravāda Buddhists still typically perform today)—giving alms; building temples and monuments; worshiping *bodhi* trees, *thūpas*, and similar reminders of the Buddha; adopting special moral codes during full moon day celebrations; listening to sermons—were not explicitly

<sup>2</sup>. Waldschmidt identifies this method of “naming” in a manuscript colophon from Central Asia, whereby a key event of a story takes the place of the name in the colophon (1980).

linked to that eventual goal. This limitation became problematic when, after the advent of Asoka Maurya in the 3rd century BCE, whole populations came to embrace the Buddha's religion. It then became vital to provide religious paradigms that laypeople and less advanced monks and nuns could emulate and thereby progress toward the soteriological goal of nirvana.

The authors of *Apadāna* overcame this limitation with the remarkable insight that if the present-life biographies of the *arahants* serve as appropriate paradigms for advanced monks and nuns, then their previous-life biographies, when they too were ordinary men and women, must serve as appropriate paradigms for less-advanced people. By doing now what the *arahants* did then, the *Apadāna* assures its audience, one can expect in the future to achieve the same release from suffering and rebirth that the *arahants* achieved as a result of having done those pious deeds. *Apadāna*'s great contribution here was to draw an explicit link between pieties performed in the present life and the achievement of arahantship during a future one. To make this revelation *Apadāna* provides biographical details of the previous lives of the *arahants* that sometimes are and always seem extensive especially in light of the short shrift given their present-life biographies. In most cases *Apadāna* provides names, occupations, places of residence, dates (either the name of the previous Buddha, or the number of aeons ago during which he lived), descriptions of the piety performed, and more or less detailed accounts of the intermediate human and divine results each *arahant* experienced prior to the present life. Because the collection is also very large (it narrates the *apadānas* of some 550<sup>3</sup> male and 40 female *arahants*), the result of this variation in

3. The Pali Text Society edition of *Apadāna* (Lilley 1925–27) includes 547 *apadānas* of males (*theras*); the Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series *Apadāna* (Vajirajñāna et al., 1961–1983) includes 559; the commentary (Godakumbura 1954) includes 561. The PTS and BJTS editions agree in relating 40 *apadānas* of females, though there are some reasons to believe that the collection once contained additional nuns' *apadānas* (see Collett 2011, 210). While I have not taken on the monumental project of constructing a critical edition of the text (for a model of which see Cutler 1997), my translation does take into account the variance in readings between the PTS and BJTS editions. Where they disagree, the critical apparatus (see n. 1) indicates the disagreement in a footnote and indicates why I have chosen one over the other; where one edition includes verses not found in the other, I translate them anyway at the appropriate juncture, double-numbering each verse according to both the PTS and the BJTS reckonings so that readers can track the differences in the two editions. This too I refrain from reproducing in the present chapter, for reasons of space, and I encourage the interested reader to pursue it via the critical apparatus supplied in the scholarly version of the complete translation online. In the present instance I have found it sufficient to refer only to the PTS edition, which will be most accessible to readers of English. I number the verses only according to the PTS edition, and accordingly also adopt the occasionally archaic transliteration system which the PTS edition also employs, notably the use of “ŋ” for the now-more-common “m” to denote the *anusvāra*.

detail is a vast catalog of efficacious pieties coupled with an almost universal appeal. People in all walks of life, castes, occupations, and regions, young and old, male and female—even animals and supernatural beings—could find a homologue among the previous lives of the *arahants*. Put differently, *Apadāna* embraced the whole of society and offered it a vast number of possible pieties that could be performed to effect future arahantship.

Yet for all this interest to address the real lives of ordinary people by detailing the previous-life biographies that the *arahants* are believed to have recalled, the *apadānas* ascribed to male *arahants*—constituting the bulk of the whole *Apadāna* collection—curiously have virtually nothing to say about marriage and previous-life spouses. Marriage is not one of the categories of biographical detail provided in the monks' past-life stories, let alone in the present-life ones, and the wives of these saints thus remain almost entirely unmentioned and unnamed.<sup>4</sup> Reading the *Therāpadāna* one might well conclude that there were no women at all behind these great men. This is curious because marriage is an institution that centrally defines lay life and distinguishes it from monastic existence. Even though these stories all narrate the eventual escape from such worldly bonds, in many or most cases that escape itself presumably would have involved certain struggles. These would have included the struggle to give up the pleasures of marriage, as well as struggles with abandoned spouses, and such struggles in turn would have been highly relevant to the audience of laypeople and still-struggling monks and nuns addressed by these texts. Interestingly, husbands and wives do figure

4. The only clear exception to this statement which I have found is in the *apadāna* of one Khomadāyaka Thera (“Cloth Provider,” #30; Ap. I:80, v. 1) who is made to say:

In the city Bandhumati  
I [lived as] a trader back then.  
In that way supporting [my] wife (dāray)  
I planted the seeds of [great] wealth.

There are a number of additional instances in which the becoming-*arahants* refer more generally to “friends, family, and relatives” whom they gathered together to perform their root pieties, as a collective agent which presumably included their wives and other women. We know from inscriptions that women were included in many such group pieties during the historical period of *Apadāna*'s composition (see below, n. 13), and women surely are intended to be among its audience (and presumably were included among its authors, on which see my next note). But the fact that this phrase specifically fails to mention wives is really a case-in-point, as becomes explicit in *Bhaddā-Kāpilāni-apadāna*'s refusal to let *Mahā-Kassapa-apadāna* get away with it (see below, section 2).

regularly in the roughly contemporary, parallel *jataka* stories of the Buddha's previous lives, in which many of the "rebirth precursors," to borrow Frank Reynolds' (1991) salubrious phrase, of the famous *arahants* also play roles. Husbands and wives also figure in various ways in the this-life-focused biographical accounts of the famous monks and nuns found in earlier canonical texts such as the Pāli *vinaya* and the *Theragāthā* and *Therigāthā*.

Indeed, it appears from a close reading of the parallel *Therī-apadāna* that this elision of wives from the monks' *apadānas* troubled some Buddhists of the day, too. While still not given the prominence we might expect, marriage plays a number of interesting roles in the nuns' *apadānas*. There, marriage is one of the details of previous, intermediate, and even present lives that the authors regularly are concerned to relate. In two of the nuns' *apadānas* in particular—that of Bhaddā-Kāpilāni Therī ("Auspicious Woman of the Kapila Clan," #27), this-life wife of the *arahant* Mahā-Kassapa, and that of Yasodharā Therī ("Famous," #28), this-life wife of the Buddha himself—we are provided in-depth reflections on the role of marriage in the kammic trajectory that leads from root piety to arahantship.

Thus we can note at the outset that concern with marriage was gendered. So it behooves us to examine that concern for the insight it might provide into the larger gendered contexts of the historical period during which, and for which, *Apadāna* was composed. This chapter therefore proceeds by exploring in Section 1 the generalized concern with marriage evinced in the *Therī-apadāna* accounts, and interpreting it vis-à-vis the absence thereof in the *Therāpadāna*. It then nuances that examination through close attention to the *apadānas* of Bhaddā-Kāpilāni (Section 2) and Yasodharā (Section 3). It concludes by returning to the collection as a whole and the gendered differences between those *apadānas* written about (and presumably by) men, and those written about (and presumably by) women.<sup>5</sup>

5. The strongest argument for female authorship of *Therī-apadāna*—and not of *Therāpadāna*—is a qualitative one: the nuns' *apadānas* reflect women's experience in very distinct ways (see Walters 1994; Collett 2011). The *Therī-Apadāna* not only focuses on women as its main subject but also narrates a world in which goddesses, laywomen, and female attendants replace the gods, laymen, and male attendants who usually figure in the monks' *apadānas*. But the authorship of the text—even its date and region of composition—remain open questions for future work. Cf also n. 1 above and n. 7 below.

## 1. Marriage in the *Therī-apadāna*

The *Therāpadāna* constitutes about two-thirds of the whole *Apadāna* collection. Generalizations about even this portion of the *Apadāna* are difficult because it contains such a variety of texts. The individual *apadānas* of the monks range in size from just a few verses to well over two hundred. In some only a single root piety under a single previous Buddha is mentioned, but in others the becoming-*arahants* perform pieties during a succession of Buddha eras. Some *apadānas* pursue literary interests that sometimes digress from the soteriological focus of the genre,<sup>6</sup> and the poetic quality of individual *apadānas* likewise varies greatly. It is thus likely that the collection represents the work of multiple authors.<sup>7</sup>

Yet there are certain conventions in *Therāpadāna* which create a sense of consistency amidst all this variation. For example, with a few exceptions all of the monks' *apadānas* conclude with this formulaic statement of arahantship:

The four analytical modes,  
and these eight deliverances,  
six special knowledges mastered,  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught!<sup>8</sup>

6. For example, the *apadāna* of the Buddha's chief disciple Sāriputta Thera (#1; Ap. I:15–31) opens with a minutely detailed description of the flora, fauna and geography of his hermitage during a previous life as the ascetic Saruci (v. 1–33), followed by a lengthy passage describing the virtues of his students during that time (v. 35–65). It also contains two beautiful, extended speeches in which Saruci praises the knowledge of Buddha Anomadassi (v. 77–92) and then, reborn as Sāriputta, he praises the Buddha Gotama (v. 159–208). The *apadāna* of Upāli Thera (#6; Ap. I:37–48) is similarly rich with extended metaphors describing the virtues of the Buddha and his followers, and the positive effect discipleship had upon Upāli, which seem more a display of poetic skill than a necessary detail of the kammic trajectory.

7. The tradition, which maintains that these verses were actually spoken by the monks to whom they are ascribed, would lead us to believe that there were more than five hundred authors of just the *Therāpadāna*.

8. Beginning with #371 (Pattipupphiya Thera, who is #374 in the BJTS edition) the manuscripts conclude almost all the texts in *Therāpadāna* with a fuller three-verse refrain that prefaces the main formula quoted here with two additional verses. There is some variation in the first twenty or so subsequent *apadānas*, which sometimes invert the order of the two prefaced verses, and in some instances the text substitutes a different two feet ("All my outflows are exhausted") for "Like elephants . . . without constraint." But the "inverted version" (below) becomes the consistent reading for all the rest of the *Therāpadāna* and for all of the *Therī-apadāna*:

This is followed by an equally formulaic colophon that “thus indeed Venerable [so-and-so] Thera spoke these verses. The *apadāna* of [so-and-so] Thera is finished.” As well as this formulaic conclusion, various verses and especially individual feet of verses recur over and over throughout the texts, similarly creating a sense of consistency. Most notably, many of the famous monks are said to have received a prediction of their future arahantship from a previous Buddha, and multiple-verse parts of that narrative are also shared, verbatim, across numerous *apadānas*. Buddhas are regularly referred to in strings of epithets that likewise are shared across the texts, as are the dates (in numbers of aeons ago that they lived) ascribed to the previous Buddhas.

I begin with this structural introduction to the *Therāpadāna* in order to suggest that the brief sections attributed to the Buddha (*Buddhāpadāna*) and to the Pacceka-buddhas (*Paccekabuddhāpadāna*), as well as the section attributed to the nuns (*Therī-apadāna*), are fruitfully interpreted as subsequent additions to an original core of texts about the male *arahants*. *Buddhāpadāna* follows none of these conventions of the monks’ *apadānas*, being in fact a very unique text not only for *Apadāna* but for the whole Theravāda tradition (it is described in detail below). *Paccekabuddhāpadāna* similarly is lacking these same conventions, being as it consists mostly of

---

[My] defilements are [now] burnt up;  
all [new] existence is destroyed.  
Like elephants with broken chains,  
I am living without constraint  
Being in the Best Buddha's midst  
was a very good thing for me.  
The three knowledges are attained;  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught!  
The four analytical modes,  
and these eight deliverances,  
six special knowledges mastered,  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught.

It would thus appear that this full three-verse refrain was being worked out and played with during the composition of the texts prior to about #390 of *Therāpadāna* (although the BJTS manuscripts also add the [non-inverted] full version to some of the first ten monks’ *apadānas*). The fact that *Therī-apadāna* consistently employs this finalized “inverted version” of the three-verse refrain may be taken to confirm the point suggested below, namely that *Therī-apadāna*’s composition was subsequent to that of *Therāpadāna*, i.e., to the working out of the three-verse refrain. The four *patisambhidās* or analytical modes, eight *vimokkhas* or deliverances, and six *abhiññas* or special knowledges are generalized attainments of *arahants* well known in the earlier canonical texts.

the much earlier *Padhāna-sutta* of *Sutta-nipāta*.<sup>9</sup> These two would have been added to the core in order to contextualize the monks’ *apadānas*, which all involve meeting the Buddhas and Pacceka-buddhas during previous lives.

The narratives in *Therī-apadāna* on the other hand do follow most of the conventions found in the monks’ *apadānas*. They do conclude with the formulaic statement of arahantship and the colophon,<sup>10</sup> share whole verses and especially individual feet of verses with each other and with the texts of *Therāpadāna*—in the case of the famous nuns they also share the narrative in which a previous Buddha predicts their future arahantship—employ the same epithets for Buddhas (exhibiting the same interest in their deployment), and follow the same dating scheme of the previous Buddhas. Yet there are various reasons to consider *Therī-apadāna* a subsequent addition as well. It is much shorter, containing less than a tenth of the number of individual *apadānas*, and only about one-fifth as many verses as are found in *Therāpadāna*. The manuscripts used by the Pali Text Society editor conclude *Therāpadāna* with a colophon suggesting that the nuns’ *apadānas* were at some stage not included in the collection.<sup>11</sup> Further, the 13th-century commentary, *Visuddhajanavilāśini*, likewise concludes after the *Therāpadāna* without mention of the nuns’ biographies. Beyond these structural considerations, two stylistic divergences similarly suggest separate and subsequent authorship. One of them is a consistent concern to flesh out the biographical situations of the female *arahants*, during previous as well as present/final lives, with richer detail than is found in any of the monks’ *apadānas*. The other is a sort of “feminist edge” that can be discerned in many of the nuns’ biographies, as though they were responding to an already existent text about males (cf. Walters 1994). The inclusion of details about marriage intersects both these stylistic divergences, which I therefore proceed now to describe more fully.

9. This is SN 3.2, a brief *sutta* in which Māra (Death) approaches the Bodhisatta during the six years of severe asceticism he undertook prior to attaining Buddhahood. Māra points to his emaciation and similar bodily suffering as a reason to give up the quest, then departs when this ploy fails to undermine the Bodhisatta’s determination.

10. See, however, n. 8, above: their consistent employment of the finalized, “inverted version” of the three-verse refrain may confirm that they are later/separate compositions.

11. *Ettāvatā Buddhāpadānañ ca Paccekabuddhāpadānañ ca Therāpadānañ ca samattā ti. Nibbānapaccaya hotu.* “To this extent the *apadānas* of the Buddhas, Pacceka-buddhas, and Theras are finished. Let it be the foundation for *nibbāna*!” (Ap. I:51).

Many of the *Therī-apadāna* references to marriage are merely offhand ones that establish biographical context for the main story. Thus both Ekapiṇḍadāyikā Therī (“One Ball [of Food] Donor,” #6) and Uppaladāyikā Therī (“Lotus Donor,” #33) open by naming a king from the past and indicating that “I was the wife of that king” (*tassa rāñño ahañ bhariyā*). This wife, reflecting on her failure to perform any meritorious deeds, and thereby her consequent destiny for rebirth in hell, asks her husband to provide her with a monk to whom to give alms (Ap. II:515–16, v. 1–4; Ap. II:601, v. 1–5). In each of the two narratives, the wife is granted this opportunity and proceeds to perform the root piety that eventuates her arahantship. Similarly, Uppalavannā Therī (“Lotus-Colored,” #19) relates that in one of her intermediate births she, “having been the chief queen of the king of Benares” (*kāsirañño mahesi ‘hañ hutvā*), gave birth to no fewer than 500 royal sons. In their youth, while sporting in the water, they all become Pacceka-buddhas after seeing fallen lotus leaves. Bereft of them she dies in grief, but reborn in the next life, while providing alms to eight Pacceka-buddhas, she remembers her former sons and in her maternal love milk then flows from her breasts (Ap. II:555, v. 58–62). In her present/final life Paṭācārā Therī (“Wanderer in a Cloth,” #20) marries a commoner (*narañ janapadaj*, “a man of the countryside”) and goes off with him against the wishes of her opulent parents. When she is pregnant with her second child, however, she sets out to visit her parents, carrying the first-born with her. Her husband, displeased, chases after her, but when he reaches her a terrible storm arises. Going off to build a shelter, he is killed by a serpent. Grieving and beset with labor pains she crosses a river and gives birth, but when she then goes back across the river to retrieve her elder son the infant is carried off by an osprey, while the older boy is swept away in the current of the river. She then returns to her home only to discover that her parents and siblings have all died and are being cremated together at that very moment. Thereupon meeting the Buddha, she is quickly able to grasp his teaching that sons, parents, and relatives offer no protection against suffering and attains arahantship (Ap. II:558–59, v. 22–35). Kisā-Gotamī Therī (“Lean Gotamī,” #22) is likewise born in a millionaire’s clan during her present/final life, but her own family is destitute. She marries into a well-off family (*gatā . . . sadhanay kularj*) but other than her husband (*patiy thapetvā*) the rest of them despise her poverty until she gives birth to a son, upon which she is much-beloved. When, however, the son then dies she goes mad with grief and wanders about with the corpse in hand, trying to find a medicine to revive

him. She finally meets the Buddha who famously tells her that he can bring the son back to life with a white mustard seed obtained from a home that has experienced no death. Going from home to home she eventually comes to understand death’s terrible universality, and like Paṭācārā makes this realization the foundation for her own arahantship (Ap. II:565–66, v. 19–25). Dhammadinnā Therī (“Given by Dhamma,” #23) “goes to another family” (*parakularj gantvā*) and lives happily until her husband (*sāmiko*) hears the *dhamma* and becomes a non-returner; she then also goes forth and becomes an arahant (Ap. II:569, v. 24–26). Like her, Sonā Therī (“Cleansed,” #26) “goes to a husband’s family” (*gantvā patikulaj*) and gives birth to ten sons, but when to her displeasure they all renounce the world along with their father, she tracks them to the monastery where they are staying. Meeting a nun who instructs her in the nature of suffering, she quickly achieves arahantship (Ap. II:577, v. 10–17).

In each of the foregoing examples, the fact of marriage is a necessary contextualizing detail, in the absence of which the main story could not be narrated. This no doubt reflects a historical situation in which a grown woman’s status was largely defined by her husband (and after his death, her sons), just as an unmarried girl’s status was largely defined by her father and other male relatives.<sup>12</sup> Marriage (or birth) to powerful men largely determined the power of women. Alice Collett (2011) has persuasively argued that a central goal of the *Therī-apadāna* narratives was “to establish a female past for the [Buddhist] tradition” in which, we know from inscriptional and archaeological evidence, women did play significant roles as nuns and lay donors.<sup>13</sup> Given that historical situation, it

12. It is important to recognize that some of the nuns’ *apadānas* refer to fathers and other male relatives as a contextualizing detail that functions much like marriage does in the foregoing examples. This is especially clear in the repeated narrative about the seven daughters of Kīkī the King of Kāsi (Benares) studied by Alice Collett (2011). They—including several of the nuns just mentioned (Uppalavannā, Paṭācārā, Kisā-Gotamī, and Dhammadinnā)—were sisters (during the time of the previous Buddha Kassapa) who, refused permission by their father to become nuns, nevertheless remained in the home unmarried and devoted themselves to performing meritorious deeds. In *Therī-apadāna* a number of other nuns similarly perform their root pieties “while tagging along with father,” e.g., Sigālaka-mātā Therī (#34; Ap. II:603, v.3) and Mahāpajāpaṭī Gotamī Therī (#17; Ap. II:537, v. 97). This displacement of woman’s agency onto her husband and other male relatives was formalized in the classical law books of Brahmanism (*dharmaśāstras*), which maintained that marriage was the single and definitive life-cycle ritual (*samskāra*) for women. See the next chapter of this volume, chapter nine, for a discussion of some Brahmanical notions of marriage.

13. For a discussion see Walters (1994, esp. p. 371 and references provided in the notes there); cf. Walters (1997, esp. p. 186, n. 42).

should come as no surprise that this past was often established on the basis of a given woman's marriage (or parentage).

The necessity of marriage to establish this female past becomes especially apparent when we consider another category of marriage references found in the *Therī-apadāna*. The text contains a stock claim made by many of the individual female *arahants* that during her intermediate lives she "was fixed in the chief queen's place" (*mahesittay akārayiṇ*) of a certain number of kings of the gods, and likewise of a certain number of human kings, some of whom usually are specified to have been wheel-turning (*cakkavatti*, Skt. *cakravarti*) monarchs.<sup>14</sup> This claim is best understood in light of the parallel Buddhist history constructed in *Therāpadāna*. Here a great number of male *arahants*, using parallel stock phraseology, claim the obverse. During their intermediate lives they were kings of the gods and wheel-turning or lesser human kings some specified number of times (usually bearing personal names reflective of the root piety that led them into those exalted stations).<sup>15</sup> This sovereign achievement is sometimes included among the predictions that the previous Buddhas make of them. The history of divine and human rulership thus constructed—which is populated by becoming-*arahants* and fuelled by the good *kamma* of their root pieties—opens an obvious space for female counterparts because divine as well as human kings famously enjoy superior (and oftentimes numerous) wives.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes the previous Buddha's prediction specifies, as in the case of Sāriputta ("Sāri's Son") Thera, that:

14. This stock claim recurs in the *apadānas* of Sumedhā Therī ("Wise" #1); Tīṇinalamālikā Therī ("Three Reed Garland-er" #5); Ekapiṇḍadāyikā Therī ("One Ball [of Food] Donor" #6; Kāṭacchubhikkhadāyika Therī ("A Spoonful of Begged-for Food Donor" #7); Sattuppalamālikāya Therī ("Seven Blue Lotus Flower-er", #8); Pañcadipikā Therī ("Five Lamps" #9); Udkadāyikā Therī ("Water Donor", #10); Ekūposathikā Therī ("One Full Moon Observance", #11); Ekāsanadāyikā Therī ("One Seat Donor" #14); Pañcadipadāyikā Therī ("Five-Lamps Donor" #15); Sālamālikā Therī ("Sal Garland-er" #16); Khema Therī ("Peace" #18); Bhadda-Kundalakesa Therī ("Auspicious Curly-Hair" #21); Nandā or Janapadakalyāṇī Therī ("Joy" or "Beauty of the Countryside" #25); Uppaladāyikā Therī ("Lotus Donor", #33). Several more nuns, including Bhaddā-Kāpilāni Therī (#27) and Yasodharā Therī (#28), who are discussed in the next two sections, also claim to have been married to human and/or divine kings without however employing this stock phraseology.

15. This theme, in one variation or another, is found in virtually all the monks' *apadānas*, even those which are only a few verses long (and in which, therefore, this claim becomes the most salient biographical detail provided). I leave off listing them here for considerations of space.

16. For a provocative examination of just how seriously human kings' superior sexuality was taken see Ali 2004.

Women numbering sixteen thousand,  
ladies who're all-ornamented  
with varied clothes and jewelry  
and wearing earrings made of gems  
with long eyelashes, lovely smiles  
and slim waists; pleasant to look at  
will ceaselessly surround this one;  
that's the fruit of Buddha-pūjā.

(Ap. I:22, v.106–7)<sup>17</sup>

And the wheel-turning monarchs are regularly introduced with the epithet "possessor of the seven gems" (*sattaratanaśampanno*), among which the "woman gem" (*itthiratana*, Skt. *striratna*) was reckoned an especially significant one.<sup>18</sup> But none of the texts of the *Therāpadāna* draws the obvious (and marvelous) conclusion, namely that the superb female consorts of such becoming-*arahant* god-kings and human-kings were (and in the context of the day, are) themselves becoming-*arahant* god-queens and human-queens. Only in *Therī-apadāna* does this possibility become explicit. In its opening verses, Sumedhā Therī ("Wise," #1) states that "being the chief queen of one who possessed the seven gems, I was the woman-gem" (Lilley II:512, v. 3: *sattaratanaśa mahesi itthiratanay ahay bhavij*). As *Therī-apadāna* proceeds to enumerate the vast number of times that particular nuns were chief queens of god-kings and human-kings, it repopulates *Therāpadāna*'s universal history with the women who later became *arahants* in the dispensation of Gotama Buddha. This establishes further place for women in the Buddhist past and likely proved especially poignant to those in the *Apadāna*'s audience who were themselves Buddhist queens.

The necessity of marriage that I have been discussing certainly points to the dependence of Buddhist queens on Buddhist kings. This is the case whether we are talking about legendary queens in a constructed Buddhist past or real ones in a then-present Buddhist audience. But as John Strong

17. Virtually identical (future) pleasures are predicted of Upāli Thera (#6, Ap. I:40, v. 38–39) and Upavāna Thera (#22, Ap. I:73, v. 40–41). Additional prediction sequences too numerous to detail here assure the becoming-*arahant* of more generalized pleasures in heaven.

18. The other six gems of a wheel-turning monarch were his wheel (*cakka*, sometimes understood to mean the chariot, and sometimes a more symbolic representation of his power), elephant, horse, gem, steward (or wealth), and advisor.

(2003) has provocatively suggested in his study of “Buddhist Queenship,” dependence was only one-third of the case. In his reading of the story of Asoka Maurya’s queen, Asandhimittā, Buddhist queens and kings were also to some extent *interdependent*: possessing the “seven gems” made marriage a requirement for the *cakkavattin* kings too. Also, we know from inscriptional evidence that Buddhist and later non-Buddhist kings relied upon their queens to perform Buddhist pieties for them (cf. Walters 2000, 110–11; Walters 2008, 174–77, 179). More important, according to Strong, Buddhist queens were also to some extent *independent*. We start to see what I have dubbed the “feminist edge” in *Therī-apadāna* when we remember that these women became queens of divine and human kings not because of those males, but because of the root pieties that they themselves performed during their own previous lives. This point is made explicit in the way Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī’s *apadāna* (#21) presents the generalized attainment:

In whichever place I’m reborn,  
as a result of that *kamma*  
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of kings in this and that [heaven].  
Fallen from there, among humans,  
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of kings who turned the wheel [of Law]  
as too of kings in [their] circles.<sup>19</sup>

(Ap. II:561, v. 11–12)

The repetition of these two verses in the *apadāna* of Nandā (Janapadakalyāṇī) Therī (#25) adds emphasis to its explicit revelation that one becomes a Buddhist queen through one’s own meritorious *kamma*.

Many of the additional *Therī-apadāna* passages about being the chief queen of so many kings of gods and *cakkavattins* nuance this point. The stock claim is phrased in such a way as to emphasize that these exalted marriages during the intermediate lives were about female, in addition to male, power. Thus Ekapindadāyikā Therī (#6) states:

19. That is, kings whose underlordship to world-conquering emperors was enacted through their participation in his imperial circle (*rājamanḍala*), on which see especially Inden (1981); Inden (2000). For its playing out in the ancient and medieval Sri Lankan Buddhist kingdoms that preserved the *Apadāna* see Walters (2000); Walters (2008).

I was fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of thirty kings among the gods.  
Whatever my mind wishes for  
comes into being as desired.<sup>20</sup>  
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of twenty kings who turned the wheel.  
With accumulated [merit]  
I transmigrated through lifetimes.

(Ap. II:516, v. 8–9)

Similarly, the previous Buddha Tissa predicts of the becoming-*arahant* Katacchubhikkhadāyikā Therī (#7) that:

Giving this spoonful of begged food,  
you will go to Tāvatiṃsa.<sup>21</sup>  
You’ll be fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of thirty-six kings of the gods.  
You’ll be fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of fifty kings who turn the wheel.  
Everything your mind may wish for  
you will receive [it] every day.  
Having enjoyed [great] happiness  
you will go forth possessionless.  
Destroying all [your] defilements,  
you’ll reach *nibbāna*, undefiled.

(Ap. II:517, v. 3–5)

In a stronger statement still, Sattuppalamālikāya Therī (#8) claims:

I was fixed in the chief queen’s place  
of seventy kings of the gods.  
Everywhere a female ruler  
I transmigrated life to life.  
I was fixed in the chief queen’s place

20. These same two feet are repeated in the same context in the *apadāna* of Sālamālikā Therī (#16; Ap. II:529, v. 4).

21. The highest heaven.

of sixty-three wheel-turning kings.  
They all conform to my [wishes];  
I'm she whose words are listened to.

(Ap. II:518, v. 11–12)

The rulership of the queens, and the good *kamma* that produced it, was their own. Many of the individual nuns' *apadānas* also stipulate that Buddhist queens enjoyed many pleasures, including being happy, being wealthy, being attended upon by others, and enjoying fabulous heavenly mansions. These were likewise their own, experienced independently of their royal husbands.

Strong's threefold analysis of the Buddhist queen as simultaneously dependent, interdependent, and independent helps us make sense of the complexity found in the *apadānas* of the two most famous wives of saints, Bhaddā-Kāpilāni and Yasodharā. Both of them were likewise chief queens to their present-life husbands (Mahā-Kassapa and the Buddha, respectively) when the latter were enjoying their intermediate lives as divine and human kings. In the *apadānas* of those *therīs*, too, we see ways in which they were dependent on their husbands; but also ways in which they and their husbands were interdependent, and an insistence that in some ways they were independent of their husbands. I turn to these detailed pictures of kammic marriage in the following two sections. But I conclude this section by pointing to a final *apadāna* in which this "edgy" independence of wives from their husbands is especially clear, that of Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī (#21).

Though not a queen, in her present life Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā was the daughter of an opulent millionaire. Becoming infatuated with a thief she sees being led for execution, she soon marries him after her father purchases his freedom. She lives as his "trustworthy, very loving and friendly" wife but "that enemy, being greedy for [her] valuable ornaments," leads her to a mountain precipice on the pretense of performing a sacrifice. In fact, he intends to murder her. Discerning his plan she attempts to save her life by offering him her finery freely and lowering herself to the status of "bed-slave" (*mañca-dāstī*). But then he replies:

Take it off, o beautiful one,  
[and] do not feel a lot of grief;  
I am unable to accept  
wealth that I did not kill to get.

For as long as I remember  
since I attained to puberty  
I've accepted no other one  
more beloved than you [to me].

(Ap. II:562, v. 28–29)

She quickly devises a ruse to get him to the edge of the cliff, then throws him into the precipice, reveling:

The man is not the one who's wise  
in every single circumstance;  
paying attention here and there  
the woman is the one who's wise.  
The man is not the one who's wise  
in every single circumstance;  
quickly thinking strategically  
the woman is the one who's wise.

(Ap. II:562, v. 31–32)

## 2. Bhaddā-Kāpilāni as the wife of a saint

Bhaddā-Kāpilāni Therī ("Auspicious Woman of the Kapila Clan" #27) of the *Therī-apadāna* (Ap. II:578–84, 70 verses), was the this-life wife of one of the Buddha's chief disciples, the arahant Mahā-Kassapa ("Great Kassapa") Thera. Mahā-Kassapa was reckoned the male member of the early community most advanced in austere practices, and his own *apadāna* appears as #3 in the *Therāpadāna* (Ap. I:33–35, 22 verses). In this section of the chapter I compare the *apadānas* of husband and wife because together they allow me to further illustrate a number of the general themes introduced in the previous section, and because Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna* provides a particularly detailed account of the intersection of marriage and *kamma* in the trajectory from root piety to arahantship.

Mahā-Kassapa's *apadāna* is typical of the *Therāpadāna*. It is completely silent about Mahā-Kassapa's marriages, but in his case this is particularly jarring because, as we shall see, their multi-life conjugality figures so centrally in the *apadāna* of his wife. The husband's comparatively brief *apadāna* opens with a description of his root piety: building a splendid

*thūpa* for the departed Padumuttara Buddha (100,000 aeons ago) in concert with his “family and friends” (v. 1–6). This is followed by thirteen verses (v. 7–19) detailing the heavenly mansion he enjoyed among the gods; the worldly palace he enjoyed as the *cakkavattin* named Ubbiddha 60,000 aeons ago (during which aeon he was a *cakkavattin*, presumably by the same name, “fully thirty times”); and the great city Rammaka that those *cakkavattins* ruled. The text concludes with the briefest allusion to his present/final life:

Having lived there and having left  
I returned to the world of gods.  
In this, my final existence,  
I'm born in an accomplished clan.  
Born into a *brahmin* family  
I had a massive heap of gems.  
Eight hundred million [worth of] gold  
abandoned, I renounced [the world].  
The four analytical modes,  
and these eight deliverances,  
six special knowledges mastered,  
[I have] done what the Buddha taught! (v. 20–22)

The wife's *apadāna* also opens in the time of Padumuttara, but it tells the back-story to the building of the *thūpa* then. At that time, Mahā-Kassapa was then named Videha, a leading millionaire with many gems in the city of Hamṣavati. One time, along with his servants, he went to hear Padumuttara Buddha preach and on that occasion the Buddha praised the disciple who was foremost in the practice of austerities. The millionaire served the Buddha alms for a week then aspired to attain that state himself, making everyone in his retinue smile. At that very instant Padumuttara Buddha predicted the future arising of Gotama Buddha and the millionaire's rebirth as Kassapa, who would indeed be foremost among the disciples who practice austerities. Gladdened by that he then lovingly served Padumuttara Buddha the rest of his life (v. 1–9). Only then does the Buddha pass away (v. 10) and:

When that World-Chief reached *nibbāna*  
assembling [his] kinsmen and friends  
to do *pūjā* to the Teacher

with them [Videha] had constructed  
a *thūpa* that was made of gems  
rising up seven leagues [in height]  
which blazed forth just as does the sun;  
like a regal *sal* tree in bloom. (v. 11–12)

The wife's *apadāna* here unmistakably refers to the opening of her husband's *apadāna* by mentioning the detail that he acted in concert with his family and friends; it even borrows the imagery of blazing like the sun or a blooming *sal* (*Vateria acuminata*) tree from the husband's *apadāna*. But as though all the details of the back-story weren't enough, Bhaddā-Kāpilāni then proceeds to describe the *thūpa* itself in far greater detail than even Mahā-Kassapa's somewhat elaborate (for these texts) account. Her *apadāna* supplies, in nine verses, a description of the *thūpa*'s architectural features and the rituals that, she says, her husband performed there for the rest of his life (v. 13–21).

Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna* proceeds to describe a series of additional root pieties performed by her husband during previous lives:

1. As a Brahmin living in Bandhumatī who gave Vipassi Buddha (91,000 aeons ago) a cloak (v. 24–30).
2. As a “ruler of the earth” in Benares who gave costly alms and various gold objects to eight Pacceka-buddhas (v. 30–35).
3. As one of three brothers in a happy landholding family outside the Benares gates who gave alms to a Pacceka-buddha (v. 35–41).
4. As a sage named Sumitta, again in the region of Benares, who gave an unspecified number of Pacceka-buddhas a[nother] cloak (v. 47–48).
5. As a member of the Koliya clan in the Kingdom of Kāsi (Benares) who with 500 kinsmen served 500 Pacceka-buddhas alms for three months then gifted them all with monastic robes (v. 49–51).
6. As a king named Nanda whose specific piety is unmentioned (v. 52).
7. As the world-ruling King Brahmadatta who personally served 500 Pacceka-buddhas (v. 53–55).

Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna* further provides details of Mahā-Kassapa's present/final life, including his given name, birthplace, and parentage (v. 56), and the details of his arahantship (which occurs when he is moved at the sight of a crow devouring some creature, v. 59). None of these details—not even a reference to the austere practices for which he is best known—is found in Mahā-Kassapa's own *apadāna*.

On first blush the subject of the wife's *apadāna* is thus actually the husband, but the interest of the text goes beyond mere reportage of biographical details about Mahā-Kassapa. Throughout this narrative, Bhaddā-Kāpilāni gently but consistently is inserted into the rich kammic biography thus produced of her husband:

There was then in Hamṣavatī  
a leader known as Videha,  
a millionaire with many gems;  
I was the wife of him [back then]. (v. 2)  
Along with that millionaire I,  
as long as I lived [also] did  
those merit-filled deeds thoroughly;  
[and] with [him] I [had] good rebirths.  
Experiencing happiness  
both as a human and a god,  
I was reborn along with him,  
like a shadow with the body. (v. 22–23)  
And at that time, of the same mind,  
I was his *brahmin* woman [wife] . . . (v. 26)  
. . . he spoke these [words] to me [just then]:  
“Approve of this great good *kamma*,  
the cloak given to the Buddha.”  
Then clasping hands together I,  
well-satisfied, did [then] approve:  
“Husband, this cloak is gifted well  
to Best Buddha, the Neutral One.” (v. 28–29)  
I was the chief queen of that [king],  
supreme in his troupe of women.  
I was extremely dear to him  
due to past love for [my] husband. (v. 31)  
. . . I gave that very almsgiving  
with the Kāsi king [way] back then. (v. 35)  
I was [the Sage Sumitta's] wife,  
happy, joyful and [much] beloved . . . (v. 48)  
[I] too sharing in that merit  
approving of that great alms gift . . . (v. 49)  
I was the [Koliyan's] wife then  
following [his] path of merit . . . (v. 51)

. . . I was [King Nanda's] chief queen [then];  
my every desire was fulfilled. (v. 52)  
. . . dwelling in the royal garden  
I [too] worshiped those Gone-Out Ones. (v. 54)  
My father having adorned me  
with a thick golden ornament  
gave me to the wise Kassapa  
who'd avoided desire for me. (v. 58)  
When wise [Kassapa] had renounced  
I followed him in renouncing . . . (v. 61)

Though many of these passages are indicative of her dependence on her husband—“like his shadow”—Bhaddā-Kāpilāni clearly takes this to be a good thing:

After not a very long time  
I achieved the *arahant*-state.  
O! Being the “beautiful friend”<sup>22</sup>  
of the resplendent Kassapa! (v. 63)

And as with the Buddhist queens discussed in the previous section, dependence is not the end of the story here.

Many of the passages just quoted are suggestive of the interdependence of husband and wife, who perform these pious deeds together. The *brahmin* who gives Vipassi Buddha a cloak seems to need his wife's approval (which she gives). Also, it takes but a small stretch of the imagination to realize that the wife would have been integral to any of these pieties: the duties of a wife would include organizing things, cooking the food, and sewing and then replacing the cloak that had been given away.<sup>23</sup> In Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's account of Mahā-Kassapa's almsgiving to a Pacceka-buddha, when he was one of three landholding brothers (v. 35–41), we get

22. *Kalyāṇa-mittā* is a term the Buddha uses in the *suttas* to indicate the sort of companion who enables, encourages, and entwines one in meritorious things. It is juxtaposed with the “ugly (*akalyāṇa*) friend” who enables, encourages, and entwines one in demeritorious things.

23. Such domestic service is an especially prominent theme in Yasodharā Therī's *apadāna*, discussed in the next section.

a particularly rich glimpse into what must indeed have been the complex inner-workings of a household committed to performing acts of merit. The eldest brother (who is Mahā-Kassapa's rebirth precursor) is away from the house when the Pacceka-buddha comes for alms. The youngest brother offers the Pacceka-buddha his eldest brother's portion of food. When the eldest returns and his wife (Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's rebirth precursor) tells him what has happened, he "does not rejoice about that almsgiving" (*nābhinandittha so dānay*), so the wife takes the food back from the Pacceka-buddha and gives it to her husband. When he then gives it back to the Pacceka-buddha himself, the wife is enraged.<sup>24</sup> She retrieves the bowl for a second time, throws away the food, fills it up with mud, and then gives it once again to the Pacceka-buddha! But when she then notices the Pacceka-buddha's equanimity—he has remained unmoved by the whole scene, and accepts the bowl of mud without any difference from the way he accepted the home-cooked meal—she has a change of heart. She takes back the bowl for a third time, cleanses and perfumes it, fills it with clarified butter (*ghata*, ghee) and offers it to him with proper reverence (*sakkāray aday*). This restores to the whole household the meritoriousness of giving alms to a Pacceka-buddha, which means that in that instance, anyway, Kas-sapa's rebirth precursor, in several ways, would not have made merit except for the actions of his wife.

This interdependence of husband and wife becomes explicit at two points near the end of Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna*. Here the syntax of the text, otherwise narrated in the third person, with first person interjections, suddenly shifts to the second person plural:

24. The text does not specify *why* that makes her so angry (*rūphā*); it assumes that its audience will immediately understand the reason. I imagine something like this: the husband expresses his displeasure in terms that implicate the wife—"I come home for lunch and there's nothing for me to eat"—so she does something unthinkable in the context of *Apadāna* (and Theravāda Buddhist culture), taking alms back from a Buddha so her husband can eat the food himself. When he then turns around and gives the food back to the Buddha again, he reveals that his intention was not to get fed, but rather to earn the merit for himself. (He is responding to what may have already been a tense situation, if the initial return of the food struck him as an already-angry insult on the part of his wife, perhaps because she made a sarcastic comment, "Fear not, *here's your lunch*"). The wife, who presumably cooked the meal in the first place, has now been chastised for a lapse in her domestic responsibility. She has turned a merit-making (*pūraṇa-kamma*) opportunity into an act of demerit (*pāpa-kamma*) in order to rectify that lapse, only to realize that the real lapse was in her husband's greediness for merit even at her expense. So she would have had plenty of cause to become enraged, especially if the return of the food had already been a volley in a marital spat.

Both of us having built *thūpas*,  
going forth [renouncing the world]  
experienced the boundless states  
[and] then we went to Brahma's world. (v. 55)  
Seeing the dangers in the world  
we both [went forth] as renouncers.  
We are now free of defilements;  
tamed, cooled off, gone to *nibbāna*. (v. 67)

Though in Mahā-Kassapa's *apadāna* his kammic trajectory involves only himself, in Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna* the story is about a team effort; her husband's kammic trajectory is intimately interlinked with her own. The support, approval, work, and co-participation she provides her husband, life after life, enables both of them to progress toward their eventual arahantship. Being his wives she enriches his lives, paralleling the way in which the wife's *apadāna* enriches the husband's by adding numerous bare-bones details and fleshing them out with human texture, struggle, and humor. In this concern with the human texture of the details, and with finding women a place in an otherwise all-male Buddhist history, Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna* is as typical of *Therī-apadāna* as is Mahā-Kassapa's of *Therāpadāna*.

Finally, in the denouement of the story about the bowl of mud we catch a glimpse of the wife's independence from her husband, too. The almsgiving, in the end, is entirely her own doing, and produces kammic results accordingly. For several verses Mahā-Kassapa uncharacteristically disappears from the narrative, which is explicitly only about Bhaddā-Kāpilāni:

In whichever place I'm reborn,  
because [I gave] alms I'm gorgeous;  
through [giving] Buddha tasteless food  
my breath has a horrible stench.  
Again when Buddha Kassapa's  
*thūpa* was being completed,  
delighted, I [then] gave [for it]  
an excellent tile made of gold.  
Through four lifetimes having applied  
scented [substances] to that tile  
every one of [my] limbs was freed  
from the defect of bad odor.

Having made seven thousand bowls [each adorned] with the seven gems and filled with clarified butter, placing [in them] a thousand wicks with a mind that was very pleased I proceeded to light [them all] and laid them out in seven rows to do *pūjā* to the world's lord and at that time especially I was the merit-receiver . . . (v. 42–47)

In light of this, we can understand that even when she was following after her husband it was *she* who gave alms, *she* who approved of the cloak, *she* who followed after him, *she* who worshipped the Pacceka-buddhas. Accordingly, Mahā-Kassapa also disappears in the narrative of her own arahantship (v. 61–63). Ultimately, these are all her deeds, not his.

### 3. *Yasodharā as the wife of a saint*

The female *arahant*'s interdependence with, and independence from, even a saintly husband like Mahā-Kassapa is even clearer in the other text of the *Therī-apadāna* that takes up the intersection of marriage and *kamma* as a central theme, namely the *apadāna* of Yasodharā Therī, this-life wife of the Buddha (#28, Ap. II:584–90).<sup>25</sup> Like Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna*, Yasodharā's autohagiography also provides biographical details not found in the parallel *apadāna* of her husband (the *Buddhāpadāna*). The most notable absent detail is the very fact that he was, after all, married to her throughout that kammic biography. In providing these details, the *Therī-apadāna* forcefully inserts Yasodharā into that biography and makes explicit that she was integral to the Buddha's eventual Buddhahood (interdependence). Further, her *apadāna* asserts that through her own merit-making, service, and final/present life religious practice she became

<sup>25</sup> The discussion which follows is based on the Pali Text Society edition, and rather than attempting to exhaust the story of Yasodharā it merely highlights those passages most relevant to our discussion of marriage and *kamma*. For fuller accounts the interested reader should certainly consult Sally Mellick Cutler's (1997) ground-breaking critical edition, translation, and study of the Pāli text, as well as Ranjini Obeyesekere's (2009) excellent translation and study of two medieval Sinhala retellings of it. For a non-Theravādin parallel see also Strong (1997).

a fully liberated *arahant* in her own right (independence). Following the format of the previous section, I begin with a synopsis of the husband's *apadāna* then proceed with a close study of the wife's, exploring the ways in which it responds to the absences in the former, and thereby furthers the Apadānic reflection upon the role of marriage in the kammic trajectory from root piety to arahantship.

There are actually two separate texts bearing the name *Buddhāpadāna* (or *Buddhāpadāniya*). One is the first section of the whole work (Ap. I:1–6). The other is tucked away as #387 of *Therāpadāna* (Ap. I:299–301). Here its thirty-three verses are titled "The Rags of Previous Kamma" [*Pubbakamma-piloti*] even though its colophon, and the absence of the otherwise-universal concluding refrain, make clear that this is an *apadāna* of the Buddha, not of one of the *theras* per se.<sup>26</sup> Both of these *apadānas* are highly creative, unique in the whole collection and the wider tradition, and also, especially in the case of "The Rags of Previous Kamma," very controversial (Walters 1990).

The *Buddhāpadāna* proper is even more silent about expected biographical details than the *apadāna* of Mahā-Kassapa. It mentions no names at all and, except for his perfection of the ten precepts over numerous lives (v. 73–75), it does not even allude to the well-known stories of the Buddha's previous lives (*jātaka*). Except for a brief mention of the "twofold raying miracle" (*yamakā raysivāhanā*, v. 65) it likewise does not even allude to that most famous of Buddhist biographies, the this-life biography of the Buddha. Rather, it opens with an extraordinarily detailed account of the root piety (v. 1–48), followed by a general description of the pleasures enjoyed as ruler of gods and of men in the intermediate lives (v. 49–62) and a homiletic conclusion that eulogizes Buddhahood and encourages reader-listeners to take the Buddhas as models for their own practice (v. 63–77). Here the root piety is not actually performed; it is merely an act of the imagination that reads more like a Tibetan *sādhana* than a kammic biography. The Buddha, during a previous life, constructs a vast, elaborately described palace and populates it with all the Buddhas, Pacceka-buddhas, and disciples of Buddhas of the past and present, who then engage each other in discussion and display their various powers. The pleasant results in the intermediate lives involve no specific names or

<sup>26</sup> As already mentioned in Section 1, the *Buddhāpadāna* proper also does not follow this standard convention of the monks' *apadānas*.

numbers of kings, but merely a general depiction of the pleasures divine and human kings receive by “just stretching out [their] hand” (v. 52–61). These pleasures include, detailed in a series of repetitious verses, savory foods, fabulous precious gemstones, clothes of various sorts, divine foods, all gemstones, all perfumes, all vehicles, all garlands, all ornaments, all maidens, granulated sugar, and all solid foodstuffs. The final eulogy, like the visualization of the palace, appears surprisingly Mahāyānistic in its invitation to reader-listeners to perfect the ten perfections (of a Buddha) themselves, and to marvel in the unfathomableness of Buddhahood (which is itself the root piety performed by the Buddha).<sup>27</sup>

The other, “disguised” *Buddhāpadāna*, “The Rags of Previous Kamma,” does, conversely, allude by name and event to specific previous lives and especially to the final/present life of the Buddha. After a prologue indicating that these verses were preached by the Buddha to the whole community of monks (nuns are not mentioned) at the mythic Lake Anotatta (Skt. Anavatapta, v. 1–3), it details twelve incidents in the life of the Buddha and describes the kammic cloth from which that “rag” remained (v. 4–31). These are not however the positive acts and happy intermediate lives we would expect from an *apadāna*. Rather, the twelve incidents from this life are all comparatively bad things that befell the Buddha: physical ailments, slander, attacks from his wicked cousin Devadatta, and the six years of extreme asceticism he endured prior to becoming Buddha. The acts of which these were the remaining “rags” were all of a depraved and evil sort, mostly known nowhere else in the vast Theravāda literature on the Buddha’s previous lives. The intermediate lives they produce entail countless aeons the Buddha’s rebirth precursors spent “roasting in hell” and suffering on earth. The text concludes with a pithy statement of his turn to merit-making and eventual Awakening (v. 32) and a reiteration of the context in which he declared the text (v. 33).

While both these texts are worthy of further comment, the point for us to notice here is that marriage plays no role in either of them. The closest we come is in the mention of maidens in *Buddhāpadāna* (v. 59) and the

<sup>27</sup> *Buddhāpadāna* also resonates with Mahāyāna Buddhist texts in referring to Buddhas in the plural, including multiple Buddhas in a single time-space; in its somewhat cryptic references to “Buddha-fields” (*buddhakhetta* = Skt. *buddhakṣetra*); and in the fact that like a Mahāyāna *sūtra* the mere hearing of it is productive of Buddhahood, given that what one hears and imagines is precisely what the Buddha himself imagined as he set out on the path toward Awakening.

stories of the slanderers Sundarī and Ciñcamānavikā, who both accuse the Buddha of having impregnated them in “The Rags of Previous Kamma” (v. 9, 14). Here too, this absence even of a mention of marriage is particularly apparent given its centrality to the *apadāna* of his wife, Yasodharā.

Yasodharā’s *apadāna* is also a remarkable one, with a complex literary structure. Unlike most *apadānas*, but closely paralleling that of the Buddha’s stepmother Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī (#17; see Walters 1994; Walters 1995), it begins with a prologue (v. 1–25).<sup>28</sup> On the day of her final passing into *nibbāna* (death), she tells the Buddha that her time has come:

I’m seventy-eight years old now,  
the last of old age has arrived;  
I’m reporting to the Great Sage:  
I’ve attained [sainthood] in a cave.  
Old age has ripened for me [now];  
verily my life’s a trifle.  
Giving all you up I will go:  
my refuge is made in myself.  
In the final days of old age,  
death breaks [the body into bits];  
today at nighttime, Great Hero,  
I shall achieve my *nibbāna*.  
Where there’s no birth, no growing old,  
nor sickness and death, O Great Sage,  
I’m going to the [great] city<sup>29</sup>  
[which,] unconditioned, has no death. (v. 3–6)

She asks that any lapse in their long transmigration together be forgiven, to which he replies:

<sup>28</sup> Sinhala editions such as Vajirajñāna et al., 1961–1983 IIa (1983):158, v. 952–57 provide six verses at the beginning of the text which are not found in the Lilley/PTS edition. The PTS edition begins (Ap. II:584, v. 1) at what corresponds to the seventh verse (v. 958) of the Sinhala/BJTS edition. The six extra verses spell out that, as with Gotamī, Yasodharā came to the realization of the time of death by reasoning it out for herself, then went to report it to the Buddha. The PTS begins as it were in *media res*, with Yasodharā at the head of 500 nuns on her way to report the realization to the Buddha.

<sup>29</sup> That is, *nibbāna*.

Put on a show of miracles  
to disciples of my teaching;  
let all doubt be cut off [thereby]  
in all the teaching's assemblies. (v. 9)

She proceeds to thus demonstrate her achievements with great spectacle (v. 10–24).

Then, in that same context, she declares her actual *apadāna* (v. 25–87), concluding (v. 85–87) with the standard “inverted” three-verse refrain.

The core section of her autohagiography contains three distinct movements, each of which constitutes a “mini-*apadāna*” in its own right. In the first (v. 25–40) Yasodharā addresses the Buddha directly, in the second person, referring to him in the vocative “O Great Sage” (*mahāmune*) or “O Great Hero” (*mahāvīra*). She recalls all the service she provided to him over the “tens of billions of lives” she gave to an equal number of his rebirth precursors, as their wives and attendants. She spells out this service in considerable detail—waiting upon him, cooking for him, dressing and undressing for him, giving up everything for him to acquire merit (including money, treasure, villages, small towns, fields, sons, daughters, elephants, horses, cows, slaves, slave girls, and all the wealth he gave her). All of this is portrayed as being done “for your sake” without distress despite all the suffering it admittedly entailed.

The second mini-*apadāna* (v. 41–62) recalls a moment in the time of Dipāñkara Buddha (some 100,000 regular aeons plus four incalculable aeons ago) when the Bodhisattva (future Buddha, Skt. *bodhisattva*), then reborn as the ascetic Sumedha, made his initial vow to become a Buddha and received his first prediction of its future realization. This famous narrative, absent from both the Buddha’s own *apadānas* (and so, in the *Apadāna*, supplied only here), is however told from Yasodharā’s perspective: she was then a maiden named Sumittā. Seeing Sumedha in the crowd assembled to honor Dipāñkara Buddha, and immediately smitten with him, she gives him five of the eight handfuls of the flowers she is carrying, retaining three handfuls for herself, with the aspirations that as a result of them offering her flowers to the Buddha together she should “always know [Sumedha]” (v. 49). He takes the flowers and offers them to the Buddha “for the sake of knowing [Yasodharā]” (v. 50) and after predicting Sumedha’s future Buddhahood

The Great Sage named Dipāñkara  
predicted [too] that my *kamma*

would for numberless aeons hence be exalted, that Sage So Great:  
“She will be a like-minded [wife],  
with *kamma* and conduct like [yours];  
through this *kamma* she’ll be loving  
for your [own] sake, O Great Rishi.  
Nice looking and much beloved,  
desirable, speaking sweet words,  
she will be a loving woman,  
[and] an heir among [your] doctrines.  
Just as husbands are protecting  
the goods that they accumulate  
so this one likewise will protect  
[all] the things that are most wholesome.  
Compassionate for [future] you,  
she will fulfill the perfections.  
Like a lion [freed] from a cage  
she will achieve Awakening.” (v. 52–56)

Thrilled at his words, she dedicates her future lives to Sumedha, then finally is born a Sākyan and becomes the chief woman of his harem when he has been born as Prince Siddhattha (v. 57–62).

The third “mini-*apadāna*” (v. 63–87) returns to the topic of the first: service. In a speech addressed (to the Buddha? the Buddha’s father? someone in the text’s audience?) in the vocative “O Great King” (*mahārāja*), Yasodharā details the mind-boggling numbers of Buddhas, Pacceka-buddhas, and arahants to whom she provided vast almsgivings (*mahādānar pavattayi*). These are reckoned finally in the hundreds of thousands of billions and are proof of her repeated claim that “[her] service (*adhikārāṇ*) was constant” across that vast swathe of cosmic time:

Thus every day I practiced *dhamma*  
for those who practiced *dhamma*;  
a doer of *dhamma* I am at ease,  
in this world and the next one. (v. 80)

Here the text once again returns to her final/present life, her renunciation, and her achievement of arahantship, concluding with the standard refrain (v. 81–87).

Unlike Bhaddā-Kāpilāni's *apadāna*, that of Yasodharā really adds only one salient detail to the biography of her husband, namely that throughout his lives, starting with the birth as Sumedha, she was his wife. This successive remarriage in each rebirth is something she intends and vows; it is predicted of her from the very beginning, but she makes it happen herself, through those tens of billions of lifetimes of suffering and serving as the Bodhisatta's wife. Thus the repeated claim that she did this all for the Buddha's sake appears less an indication of her dependence and subservience than a bold claim that she has enabled the Buddha's Buddhahood. For it was after all through all those lifetimes of worshiping previous Buddhas, Pacceka-buddhas, and disciples of Buddhas with her that the Buddha became Buddha at all. This would indicate the sort of "interdependence" Strong isolates among Buddhist queens. Bolder still, we can read Yasodharā's *apadāna* to mean that she, rather than her husband, was in some ways the actual agent of his Buddhahood. She gives him the flowers for the worship that first puts Sumedha on the path to Buddhahood, and even presents herself (in the quotation above, v. 50) as the reason he worshiped that Buddha (i.e., became a Bodhisatta) in the first place. Moreover, she does all the cooking, serving, giving, abandoning, suffering, and experiencing that constitute his own progress toward that goal. In her *apadāna*, the verbs are all in the first person, and large portions of the text do not even mention the Buddha except as the one to whom all of this is being declared. Remembering that the whole poem is set in the context of the wife declaring to the Buddha that on the basis of her own exalted religious achievements she is now leaving him forever for *nibbāna*, this reading can be taken as an indication that the thrust of the text is primarily not even interdependence, but rather the independence that Strong says Buddhist queens likewise enjoyed. Yasodharā's all-seeing ability to discern by herself the circumstances of her final passing, one of the six special knowledges (*chal-abhinnā*) that are among the attributes of *arahants* signaled in the universal *Apadāna* refrain, exemplifies this independence from her husband. She need not depend on him to foresee this, but foresees it by herself.

Adding to the richness and force of Yasodharā's *apadāna* is the fact that, reminiscent of the *apadāna* of her husband, it is followed by three additional *apadānas* in the collection (#29–31, Ap. II:591–97) that are all closely connected to Yasodharā. These are ascribed not to individuals but to large groups of female *arahants* who constitute Yasodharā's retinue. In previous lives (and the first part of the final/present life) all these women were co-wives living in the harem. Now, like her, they are all nuns in the

early community who have attained the highest goal. Their *apadānas*—constructed largely on the basis of verses or parts of verses found in Yasodharā's *apadāna*—completely parallel hers. Thus the *apadāna* of "The 10,000 Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā" (#29) has them all, during the time of Dīpāñkara Buddha, vow to be (and receive a prediction that they will be) the perpetual wives of the ascetic Sumedha. This is fulfilled up to and including their co-birth as beautiful women in the Buddha's clan who then join his harem and who renounce and attain arahantship in unison with Yasodharā. The *apadāna* of "The 18,000 Nuns Headed Up by Yasodharā" (#30) makes them even more exact, mirror-images of Yasodharā, reproducing the text of her first two "mini-*apadānas*" verbatim, except for minor changes (such as tweaking the first person pronouns and verbs from the singular to the plural). All 18,000 of these women approach the Buddha along with Yasodharā, and declare to him in unison that they too will now pass away. Like the first 10,000 their perpetual wife-ship for his sake was the fulfillment of a vow and prediction during the time of Dīpāñkara Buddha. They are even made to say "We are Yasodharās, Great Sage," in the passages where she identifies herself to the Buddha as part of her/their spectacular miracle show! The third group, "18,000 Kṣatriyan Maidens Headed Up by Yasodharā" (#31), declare with a lot less fanfare (and in a brief twelve verses) that they were also women of the inner chambers, born together after serving alms "for [Buddha's] sake" during previous lives, who thereafter renounced and became *arahants*.

Taken together, these additional texts amplify the anyway strong message of Yasodharā's own *apadāna* that marriage is a kammic matter that can extend over many lifetimes. Like Yasodharā herself, these parallel women all serve the Buddha both actually and metaphorically, wanting for themselves what he wants them to do (whether formerly, in terms of eroticism and political power, or presently, in terms of Buddhist accomplishments and religious power). In performing this service they collectively enable him to pursue his own Awakening, and even drive that process themselves. These texts contribute to the general *Therī-apadāna* project of finding space for women in Buddhist history, and find them a very wide space indeed: all 46,000 of these "Yasodharās" aspired to and achieved the station of "Buddha's wife."<sup>30</sup> Like the special rankings in the monastic

<sup>30</sup> In making this station a widespread achievement of religious women the texts call to mind—despite a very different cultural setting—the widespread claim among medieval Christian nuns and mystics, even some males, to be the "brides of Christ"

community (Mahā-Kassapa as foremost among those who practice austeries) this is here generalized as a station to which numerous women can aspire among future Buddhas. While the numbers seem fantastic, we must recall the Indian expectation that at least kings, in the heavens as well as on earth, should indeed have vast numbers of wives. According to Yasodharā's *apadāna* (v. 11) there were in fact many more women in the becoming-Buddha's harem—a total of 100,096—than became arahants and sang these *apadānas*. In recalling that so many women followed in Yasodharā's footsteps these texts also redress the general imbalance between male and female *apadānas*. If we take the numbers seriously, we must conclude that even though there are significantly more male than female *apadānas*, in fact the female arahants recorded in *Apadāna* as members of the early Buddhist community vastly outnumber their male counterparts.

### *Conclusion: wives of the saints in the Apadāna*

If nothing else, the great variety of *Therī-apadāna* references to marriage makes clear that despite (or perhaps even because of) the *Therāpadāna* silence about the topic, some Buddhists—those who wrote about women, who were presumably women themselves—considered marriage an integral dimension of the kammic trajectory from root piety to arahantship. Following Alice Collett I have suggested that this concern with marriage was part and parcel of the project to establish a place for women in Buddhist history. At least for the women whose *apadānas* we have reviewed—and presumably also for many of the historical women who heard them recited as members of the text's audience—marriage was a centrally important institution through which women found such place. By linking marriage with the kammic trajectory that leads to arahantship, the *Apadāna* was able to insert many of its female subjects into the otherwise all-male history it constructed and thereby to address the historical females as well as the males who read or listened to these poems. In the process emerges a sort of sacralization of the institution, which like rebirth turns out not merely to be opposed to, but rather to be an important stage in the path that leads to Awakening. The nuns' *apadānas* do, to an extent, reinforce the dependence upon and subservience to husbands enjoined upon wives by the larger culture. However, they simultaneously empower women with the knowledge that their husbands' kammic trajectories are

intertwined with their own and that they enjoy a degree of independence in which, even while married, they can pursue their own arahantship and can act as driving forces in the progress their husbands, and others, may make.

Yet at the end of her long kammic biography, it is important to underline, Yasodharā, like Bhaddā-Kāpilāni and each of the previous-life wives of the saints, human and divine, ultimately left her husband behind to realize her own Awakening. Arahantship entails the end of all ties to the world, even the world of the gods, and marriage in particular is an institution that finally must be transcended in order to become a monk or nun who can reach the end of the long, gradual path to Awakening that I have dubbed “the kammic trajectory.” In the *Therī-apadāna* no less than *Therāpadāna*, this is the central point. Though the former rebuts the latter by reflecting so widely on the important roles played by marriage during the earlier stages of that path, it agrees in taking the end point as the main point in each and every autohagiography it contains. The standard refrain encapsulates the real focus of each of the monks' and nuns' *apadānas*, namely his or her arahantship. The *Apadāna* provides all that rich biographical detail, with such poetic flourish, only in the service of narrating the final achievement of *nibbāna*. And as much as the *Therī-apadāna* weaves marriage into the kammic trajectories of all the saints, males as well as females, it also contains plenty of narratives of past lives as well as present lives of nuns in which marriage is *not* involved. These include the shared narrative of the seven sisters who explicitly resist marriage despite remaining in the house so that they can dedicate themselves independently and completely to religious activity (Collett 2011). However important it may be in some cases, in others marriage certainly is not a necessary condition of sainthood. But for the authors of the *Therī-apadāna*, and the wives who heard it recited, it was important to recognize that marriage does not preclude sainthood, either. In the early stages of the path, marriage can even be a positive soteriological force.